



THE ADOLESCENT LITERACY COACHING PROJECT (ALCP)
YEAR 1 EVALUATION REPORT

Patricia J. Kannapel

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Overview

The Adolescent Literacy Coaching Project (ALCP) was created when the Kentucky General Assembly passed legislation in 2005 requiring that students who are struggling with reading and mathematics or are not proficient on statewide tests be provided with interventions and instructional modifications. While much of the law focused on providing mathematics support, a small section of the legislation required the development of a statewide program to train literacy coaches to assist teachers of grades 4-12. The Kentucky Department of Education contracted the development and management of the program to the Collaborative Center for Literacy Development (CCLD), a collaborative of eight state universities housed at the University of Kentucky.

The first cadre of ALCP coaches began their two-year training experience in summer 2006 with eight-day summer institutes at each of four regional universities. They also received two days of training in instructional strategies from the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE), and monthly follow-up sessions throughout the 2006-07 school year. A similar format will be followed for the second year of training. In addition, new cadres of coaches will be added each year. At the end of the two years, coaches receive 12 hours of graduate credit. While the program was funded to train 20 coaches per year at eight regional universities, participation was low in the first year; only 22 coaches participated statewide.

The Research

This report shares the results of research on the first year of the ALCP. The research sought to learn:

- How coaches were selected, prepared, and supported in their work;
- What roles and responsibilities coaches assumed, and how these aligned with the International Reading Association's (IRA) *Standards for Middle and High School Literacy Coaches* (2006);
- What impact coaches had on teacher practice and on students;
- What factors facilitated and hindered the work of coaches; and
- How the literacy environment and test results in schools with literacy coaches compared to that of schools without literacy coaches.

Data on these questions were gathered through interviews with nearly all participating literacy coaches and a sample of principals in schools served by coaches, site visits to six ALCP schools, review of documents and web sources, and surveys of teachers of grades 4-12 in ALCP schools and a set of comparison schools. In the future, tests scores of these two sets of schools will be compared.

Limitations of the Research

The findings and implications shared below are drawn from a very small number of cases due to low participation in the ALCP. In addition, the first-year data are heavily weighted toward self-reports from coaches, principals, and teachers. As more coaches, schools, and districts join the project and research is conducted over a period of years, it can be determined whether the relatively positive findings after one year of implementation will continue.

Major Findings

- Selection and qualifications of coaches: Most of the coaches were identified for the position by their principal or a district administrator; only three coaches had to compete for the position. All applicants had at least five years' teaching experience, but only about one-fourth held a reading or language arts endorsement.
- Preparation of coaches: The eight-day summer institutes were consistent in their content and structure across the four regional sites, with the bulk of time spent on instructional strategies, coaching and mentoring, and strategic planning. Institute directors and participants reported that the institutes were effective in preparing coaches to begin their work in schools.
- School-year support for coaches: Monthly follow-up sessions included required participation in specified professional conferences and meetings, most of which were valued by participants. Follow-up support within the regional cadres varied in its intensity, structure, and focus. While participants in all regions found the regional cadre support among the most helpful of the follow-up activities, institute directors remarked on the lack of consistency across regional sites.
- Schools served by coaches: In the first year of the ALCP, 22 coaches served 26 schools; 15 were elementary schools, and 11 were middle and high schools. The majority of schools were rural, with enrollment ranging from 98 students to 891 students. 17 of the coaches were full-time in one school; 5 coaches served more than one school.
- Coach interactions with school staff: The coaches appeared to mostly stay within the parameters of the ALCP model in working with teachers in grades 4-12 in the four main content areas: reading/English language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies. All coaches had regular interactions with building principals or assistant principals.
- Receptivity to coaches: Principals in all schools were supportive of the literacy coach; a majority of principals were involved in and informed about the coaches' work. Coaches built support among teachers by working with those who were open to assistance, and then expanding their reach as more teachers heard positive reports and became open to the coaches' help. District leaders were relatively uninvolved in the work of most literacy coaches.
- Alignment of coaching activities with IRA coaching standards: Coaches spent most of their time engaged in activities that align with IRA Coaching Standards 1 and 2: Facilitating strategic planning around literacy, promoting productive relationships with and among school staff, strengthening their own professional knowledge and skills, and providing practical support to teachers.
- Activities of literacy coaches: The most common coaching activities reported by coaches, principals, and teachers were sharing strategies with teachers (including modeling lessons

and assisting teachers with writing instruction), helping teachers select instructional materials, providing or facilitating professional development, assisting teachers in analyzing assessment data, and linking teachers with research. About half of coaches also reported conducting classroom observations, working with teachers on selecting and using assessment tools, and coordinating school-wide literacy events.

- Professional qualities of coaches: Coaches received high marks from principals and teachers for exhibiting a host of professional and personal qualities that inspired trust and respect. Coaches were also engaged in regular professional development of their own by virtue of their participation in the ALCP.
- Most beneficial coaching activities: Teachers reported that the sharing of strategies—particularly through demonstration lessons—was among the most beneficial of the coaching activities.
- Effectiveness of coaches in staying within the coaching role: Coaches stayed within the coaching role reasonably well, although most performed a few extra duties in order to “do their part” at the school. Eight of the 20 coaches reported serving in other non-teaching roles simultaneously with being literacy coach, such as curriculum coordinator; but these roles were often compatible with the work of a literacy coach.
- Facilitators of the coaches’ work: The factors that contributed most prominently to the coaches’ success was the training and support provided by the ALCP, serving as full-time literacy coach in one school, having the support of the principal, having a prior positive relationship with the school faculty, thoughtful selection of coaches by local administrators, and the literacy coaches’ decision to work with willing teachers first.
- Hindrances to the coaches’ work: The main barriers to the work of literacy coaches were being assigned to more than one school, lack of time to serve all the teachers who could benefit from the assistance, lack of district understanding and support for the role of literacy coach, and lack of funding to support the position of literacy coach.
- Impact of coaches on teachers and students: The main impact of the literacy coaches in their first year appears to have been on teachers. Coaches, principals, and teachers alike reported that teachers have implemented many new literacy strategies learned from the literacy coach. These same sources also report some early effects of the coaches’ work on students, including improved scores on school-based assessments, improved student classroom performance, increased student enthusiasm for reading, and increased use of reading strategies by students.
- Differences in literacy environment in ALCP schools vs. comparison schools: When survey results from teachers in ALCP schools were compared with those of teachers in schools that did not have literacy coaches, it was found that: (1) a higher percentage of ALCP schools were engaged in strategic planning around literacy; (2) higher proportions of teachers in ALCP schools received professional development on improving student reading skills in their content areas; (3) teachers in ALCP schools reported more frequent use of a variety of

strategies to improve student literacy skills in their classrooms; (4) teachers in ALCP schools reported requesting help with literacy issues more frequently; and (5) teachers in ALCP schools reported receiving more frequent help in selecting literacy materials, developing literacy strategies in the classroom, developing and administering classroom literacy assessments, and receiving information and resources around literacy. There were no significant differences between the two types of schools in the amount of assistance teachers received in the area of writing instruction, or in analyzing and using assessment data.

Lessons Learned

- The Adolescent Literacy Coaching Project (ALCP) was planned and implemented effectively in the space of only a few months by contracting the work to the Collaborative Center for Literacy Development, an organization with experience implementing intensive professional development programs for teachers around literacy.
- The ALCP model included 8-day summer institutes, two days of training by the Kentucky Department of Education on strategies, and monthly follow-up sessions, which resulted in coaches being able to call upon ALCP staff, institute directors, and fellow coaches for support, and to continue strengthening their professional knowledge and skills on the job. Support from the regional cadres and ALCP staff via email, the on-line community, and cadre meetings was especially valued by coaches.
- Using the International Reading Association's *Standards for Middle and High School Literacy Coaches* as a framework gave the ALCP a focus and structure that has shaped the work in accordance with the latest national-level thinking and research on literacy coaching models.
- The strong emphasis on literacy strategies in both the summer institutes and follow-up sessions was valued by coaches and used by them at their schools. Nearly all coaches developed a repertoire of literacy strategies, which they shared with teachers in various ways, including modeling strategies in the classroom—a form of embedded professional development that was highly valued by teachers.
- Educational research has identified many “best practices” that lead to improved student achievement, but such practices often fail to make it to the classroom level because teachers and school administrators are too consumed with their day-to-day work to make deep changes in classroom practice. A program like the ALCP provides a vehicle for taking these practices directly to the classroom through a staff person dedicated to this goal.
- Requiring that coaches be employed full-time in schools meant the schools had a staff person with the time and expertise to help principals and teachers keep literacy in the forefront. In some cases, schools or districts combined the literacy coach position with an existing role, such as curriculum coordinator, but there was enough overlap in job responsibilities that this may be a sensible approach for providing literacy coaching when resources are limited.

- While improved student achievement is the ultimate goal of literacy coaches, such improvements will take time. More immediate measures of the coaches' impact include changes in teacher practice resulting in more varied instruction for students, increased use of reading and writing strategies by students, and increased student enthusiasm for reading.
- The requirement that districts fund the position of literacy coach has proven to be a barrier for many districts, resulting in low numbers of participants in what appears to be a program that may well lead to changes in teacher practice that will result in improved student achievement.

Recommendations

- In its first year of operation, the ALCP received positive reviews from institute directors, literacy coaches, principals, and teachers. Although these findings are based on a very small number of coaches, the data suggest that the training and support program for coaches should be continued in essentially its current form, with only minor adjustments. Areas in which the project may want to consider making adjustments include:
 - a. Involve principals and possibly district officials in ALCP training and support sessions
 - b. Develop a structure for school-year support to coaches that is consistent across regional training sites;
 - c. Consider whether there is a need to enhance coaches' training in these areas: achieving clarity about the coaches' role with principals and teachers; literacy strategies specific to the content areas of science, social studies and mathematics; analyzing student work and using results to shape teacher practice; structures for observing teachers and providing feedback; and characteristics of effective demonstration lessons;
 - d. Continue to strongly emphasize to schools and districts the advantages of assigning a literacy coach to one school full-time.
- Some consideration should be given to how to increase participation in the ALCP, thus building a more extensive network of literacy coaches across the state. Some possibilities are for the state to support all or part of the coach's salary, or to develop alternate positions that combine literacy coaching with other, compatible roles (as some schools and districts have already done). More information about the program may need to go out to district-level officials, perhaps through their own professional networks and conferences.